

Triterra – providing Environmental and Brownfield Consulting Service throughout the Midwest US



**Don McNabb, CGWP, CP
CEO & Visionary**

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Interview conducted by:
Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

CEOCFO: *Mr. McNabb, what is Triterra?*

Mr. McNabb: Triterra is a professional consulting firm that specializes in environmental consulting, Brownfield consulting and natural resource management services. We are based from Michigan but are able service the entire Midwest and look to provide as much value as we can to clients while helping them manage their environmental liabilities or ensure that they are making a proper investment into real estate.

CEOCFO: *What should we understand about the environment and what should be done, can be done and what do regulations cover?*

Mr. McNabb: In Michigan, there is some give and take in development of guidelines for emerging contaminants, but the state regulations must be adhered to. The overall goal is to make sure that any space is ultimately safe for the public or employees, as well as ensuring the protection of health within the natural environment surrounding us. Initially, we have to determine if there is a risk or concern in the environment, then conduct some testing to see what levels of contamination are present, and finally determine how best we can make the issue amenable to the surrounding environment where we are not affecting someone's health or anything in the natural ecosystem.

CEOCFO: *When you are evaluating a project, what are some of the things you look at that less experienced or knowledgeable people might not think you are meaningful?*

Mr. McNabb: That is a hard one because I think it depends on what type of project we are working on or who we are talking to. For example, if you are a person that is investing in real estate, you do not always see visually walking through a property, any environmental concerns that could be there unless they are physically present in the building or property itself. Thinking of what is down in the subsurface whether it is impacted soil, groundwater, or vapors. To other points beyond even the property that one would be looking at buying; it would be some of the adjacent properties. Even in today's standards, when you look out at the properties today, you have to consider what they looked like today, ten, twenty, or event fifty years ago. What the property was used for, could affect its use today.

CEOCFO: *Is that information easily available or are there some challenges going back that far?*

Mr. McNabb: Yes. It is always challenging. A lot of different communities run and manage their history and documentation differently. In some cases, especially rural communities where there are smaller communities or agencies that manage this information did not necessarily think information was as relevant when you start going backwards like pre-1980s or 1970s and less data seems available, and it is especially less available in rural communities where there was less man power or less resources to store data.

CEOFCO: *What do you do in those cases?*

Mr. McNabb: You do the best you can. We look at other sources but our review of historical searches becomes more limited to things such as aerial photographs, city directories and fire insurance maps, but those are generally only available in the more metro/populated areas, they are not likely in the rural communities.

CEOFCO: *When you are evaluating a property or looking at a project, what are some of the things that would make it a no go and what might be some of the things that could be rehabilitated?*

Mr. McNabb: The thing that it ultimately comes down to is the financial aspect of the project as to what makes it a go or no go. If there are issues present in the building such as asbestos or lead impacts that could affect the development. Let us say there is even contamination in the ground and that is going to offset the financial metrics of a project enough to where the proforma of the development does not work, it is hard to get those deals put together. They can come from various ways whether it is contamination from the ground that is creating a vapor issue or a migratory issue that could affect the air quality within an existing building to you could have asbestos present throughout a building and the abatement costs are just so high that it financially does not work for the development at hand.

In those cases, we do turn around and try to look for incentives where they are available. When it comes to larger redevelopment projects, sometimes we can incorporate some form of incentive, grant funds, tax increment financing, etc., such as in the Brownfield world where we can help offset those costs to make it a financially-stable project. However, incentives are not always available and sometimes projects get the no-go, or at least at this point in time, until a different plan or project structure is developed to make the project financially feasible.

"Our goal is to be a partner and a resource to you to help you achieve your goals and the end point of your projects." Don McNabb, CGWP, CP

CEOFCO: *Are there newer technologies or equipment available? How do you evaluate what might be useful and not a shiny object that will not be as helpful as it appears?*

Mr. McNabb: There are always advanced technologies that come into the work we do and there always seems to be new remedial products when we are dealing with contamination in the ground whether it is soil or groundwater. There are new products that are hopefully making it easier and timelier to get things cleaned up to a level that is safe. However, sometimes going through the process makes it difficult because if it is a new product you are using, and say you are pumping something in the ground that is going to clean up the area, whether you are using bacteria microbes or other sorts of products that go through, the problem becomes how well it has been vetted through the regulatory agency.

A lot of times if the agency is not aware of the product you are using, it is going to take a little longer or you may not get approval to use that product or the remedial stage that the company developed it for. It can become very difficult, and in some cases, once these products have been through and vetted in the regulatory agencies there, it tends to get easier to get these projects through the process, but it varies depending on what the remedial plan is and how well people are accustomed to or aware of the capabilities of these remedial technologies.

CEOFCO: *Are there particular types of projects you would like to work on given a choice? Do you have a preference?*

Mr. McNabb: Our preference is simply anything that is going to make our communities healthier and safer. We want to help everyone if we can, but the projects that are easier for us to handle are the larger scale projects where you are doing multi-million-dollar redevelopment where we are able to utilize our full resources of services and knowledge. In cases like these, we generally start off with the due diligence background to help someone acquire the property. Concurrently, we do a full evaluation of any Brownfield incentives out there to help offset any environmental concerns.

Then if needed, we even go into the remedial side of the development where we deal with asbestos abatement, lead abatement and possible contaminant mitigation or some form of engineering controls to prevent exposure to contaminants on the site. Those cases are really the projects we are looking for where we can utilize the full resources of our knowledge that we have here where we can maximize the benefit for someone acquiring property or even managing their own existing liabilities on occurring property.

CEO CFO: *Would you tell us about Triterra being recognized in the Inc. 5000?*

Mr. McNabb: It is always an honor to be recognized not just as a business and a targeted industry but overall, as a small business, a private business that is growing and to be recognized in a manner that compares you to a lot of other businesses. We have seen growth for a long period of time and the Inc. 5000 list gives us a good location to showcase the growth and company's background where hopefully it will give us some exposure as well.

CEO CFO: *Do you do much with the government?*

Mr. McNabb: No, we do not work directly with the federal government. We work with the agencies themselves as the regulators whether it is the EPA or in Michigan, Department of Environment Great Lakes and Energy (EGLE). We deal with them that way. We do in the state of Michigan work with the state government in two ways. We are a certified contractor to do special projects under the ISID program (indefinite scope, indefinite delivery) projects where generally there is some form of investigation on a contaminated site of a scope that gets defined specifically to each project.

We also do work through Michigan's Underground Source Tank Cleanup fund, which is managed through the Michigan Underground Storage Tank Authority where we directly work with private gas station owners when they have petroleum releases from their gas stations. In these cases, we work for the private client but they get reimbursed for our work from the established state government fund. We also help them manage the process for them to get reimbursed.

CEO CFO: *What do you look for in your people?*

Mr. McNabb: We look for people that are not all the same type. We like the diversity. We like people that are different from each other. Everyone is different from each other in many ways but we want people that think a little differently too. Having a company of 25 to 50 people that all think the same about every type of project is not going to help you move forward in the best possible way for every client, so we want people to think a little differently, but when it comes down to it, we want the people in our company to meet our core values, which are responsiveness, creativity, perseverance, integrity, and accountability. We have a base level that we want everyone to achieve, or what we say is "in our DNA" here at Triterra.

CEO CFO: *Why is community involvement important for Triterra?*

Mr. McNabb: Yes, it is very important and it goes back to the same thing that we say that we want to build healthier communities that we live, work, and play. You cannot just do that with helping in one aspect with doing your job and going home; you need to be involved in the community to make it overall healthier. There are nonprofit companies out there that need support whether it is volunteering or financial donations, in order to make it better for our communities.

The stronger communities are diverse in all avenues of business, including the nonprofits and the programs they are putting on. It is important for us to stay supportive of them and help to continue to make our communities healthier and stronger where people live, work and play.

CEO CFO: *Why choose Triterra?*

Mr. McNabb: Choose Triterra because we are not your everyday consulting firm out there just to help you complete your project. We come in and do things differently than most. We are very responsive to your needs. Our goal is to be a partner and a resource to you to help you achieve your goals and the end point of your projects.

